

Feature Writing
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Spring 2008

Course: Journalism 61-413-A01
Class hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:40 to 2: 50 p.m.
Room: Clow 150
Instructor: Grace Lim
E-mail: limg@uwosh.edu (if possible, e-mail first, before calling)
Phone: 920-233-2012 (use this number and leave message);
920-424-1042 (use Journalism main number as last resort)

Office: Clow

Office hours: Tues, 3-4:30 p.m.; Wed 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.; Thurs 9:40 a.m. to noon, and by appointment.

Reading Material:

- Copied material. I will hand this out as needed.
- Articles from online news publications and other online sources.
- *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing: Based on The Wall Street Journal* by William E. Blundell
- *Writing for Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction* by Jon Franklin
- Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual (2004 or later).

Ongoing Readings:

- **The New York Times (daily)** You can get the main stories for free online at www.nytimes.com. You'll need to sign up. Copies of *The New York Times* can be found in the Journalism Department's reading room and in Polk Library.
- *Advance-Titan*

Other Required Materials:

- A flash drive

The role of journalism/editing in Liberal Arts education

Journalists are the eyes, ears, voice and heart of society. Journalists question status quo; they fight for the proverbial "truth, justice and the American way." The skills students learn are not exclusively tailored to those who will become editors or journalists. These skills will enable the students to value accuracy and fairness. They will not be afraid to ask questions. They will not be afraid to prompt change.

Course Content

Do not be misled by the "soft news" label that features stories bear; there is nothing light or soft about effective feature writing.

Feature stories go beyond the requisite “who,” “what,” “when” and “where” of news stories; they delve into the “why” and “how” and “why should we care.” Quality feature stories give background and context to news stories that often sacrifice substance and style for speed.

This class emphasizes **producing and submitting articles for publication** in newspapers, regional and national consumer magazines, and online publications. Students will analyze the concept, writing techniques and structure of quality features in newspapers and magazines. Students will develop ideas, target stories for specific audiences, research, report and write different types of features.

Heed these words from Bruce Garrison, author of “Professional Feature Writing”:
“If you want to be a successful professional feature writer, then you have to be willing to sweat. You have to like people and be willing to spend time with them, too. You have to be willing to live with frustration. You have to make personal sacrifices... You have to be willing to work long hours. You have to have a strong desire to publish your writing.”

By the end of this course, you will have been given the chance to learn to do the following:

- Build on basic writing skills to write compelling features -- from brights to in-depth magazine pieces.
- Generate story ideas and develop them into feature stories
- Outline and structure longer pieces
- Turn breaking news stories in features
- Tackle stories that fall outside one’s comfort zone
- Research effectively (online and off-line)
- Prepare for interviews
- Find quality and diverse sources
- Conduct in-depth interviews
- Write queries
- Market (pitch) stories to editors
- Understand the legal and ethical issues involved in free-lancing

Classroom Conduct

- Computer monitors must be turned off during class lectures. Students may not use the computers during lectures.
- Students may not work on homework for this class or other classes during class lectures.
- All work must be original. Students copying another person’s assignment will receive a zero for that assignment. Two students turning in identical homework will each receive a zero for that assignment.
- Students caught cheating on quizzes will receive a zero for that quiz.
- Cell phones must be turned off or set to vibrate so they won’t disturb other students.

Class time will be devoted to a mixture of lecture, discussion and lab work. Each day's reading assignment must be done before you come to class.

Attendance

Mandatory. If you do miss class, you are still responsible for that day's material. You'll need to rely on a classmate for class notes. In general, however, you will **not** be able to make up missed quizzes, exams or other assignments unless you **notify the instructor before class meets** and provide an acceptable excuse, such as illness, religious observance or participation in university activities at the request of university officials.

In the event of a major illness, a death in the family or other serious situation, please contact me by telephone or leave a message on voice mail before you are absent. It is important and mandatory that you contact me the day of your absence by phone or in person. We will work out a solution regarding your class work. **Routine medical appointments, part-time or full-time jobs do not constitute valid reasons for missing class.**

You are allowed two absences without penalty (you will NOT be able to make up quizzes and labs). After that, every class missed for reasons not specified by University policy is one-half letter grade off your final grade.

Late papers: In the "real" world, a missed deadline means a gaping hole in the newspaper or magazine. Meet the deadlines or suffer dire consequences. (Your grade will be lowered one-half letter grade for each day your paper is late.) Plan your stories in advance. Missing sources is no excuse. Always have backup sources ready.

Grades

In this class, we will put the most emphasis on writing publishable stories. I will run this class as I would a metropolitan magazine newsroom. We will hold story meetings; you will update me (your editor) on your progress; you will meet with me one-on-one during final edits.

ALL MAGAZINE FEATURES WILL BE SENT OUT TO PROSPECTIVE MAGAZINE EDITORS.

ALL MULTI-MEDIA FEATURES will be uploaded to YouTube. You, as the journalist, will take ownership of the time, effort and care you put into your stories.

(A bonus will be given for a successful query that generates a **national** magazine assignment. Aim high. The target publication must meet the instructor's standards. (No blogs, friends' Web sites, etc.) The bonus will worth 10 percent of your final grade.)

To earn a C in this course, you'll have to complete the following:

- **Two** newspaper features; edited and peer reviewed, and approved by the instructor (This may require more than one rewrite.)
- **Two** magazine-length features, edited and peer reviewed, and approved by the instructor. (This may require more than one rewrite.)
- **One** query letter (including writers' guidelines and a copy of the magazine's masthead)
- **Two** multi-media stories
- **Two** written peer reviews of other students' stories
- **One** in-depth story analysis

To earn a B, you'll have to complete the following:

- **Three** newspaper features; edited and peer reviewed, and approved by the instructor (This may require more than one rewrite.)
- **Two** magazine-length features, edited and peer reviewed, and approved by the instructor. (This may require more than one rewrite.)
- **Two** query letters (including writers' guidelines and a copy of the magazine's masthead)
- **Two** multi-media stories
- **Three** written peer reviews of other students' stories
- **One** in-depth story analysis

To earn an A, you'll have to complete the following:

- **Three** newspaper features; edited and peer reviewed, and approved by the instructor (This may require more than one rewrite.)
- **Three** magazine-length features, edited and peer reviewed, and approved by the instructor. (This may require more than one rewrite.)
- **Three** query letters (including writers' guidelines and a copy of the magazine's masthead)
- **Two** multi-media stories
- **Four** written peer reviews of other students' stories
- **One** in-depth story analysis

Quizzes, homework, labs will account for up to 10 percent of your final grade.

Each of you will receive this chart that you will use to monitor your output.

Grades	C	B	A
Newspaper Features	1. 2.	3.	
Peer Reviewed	1. 2.	3.	
Instructor Approved	1. 2.		3.
Magazine Features	1. 2.		3.
Peer Reviewed	1. 2.		3.
Instructor Approved	1. 2.	3.	
Query Letters/ Writer's Guidelines/ Copy of current masthead	1.	2.	3.
Multimedia Stories	1. 2.		
Peer Reviews - Written	1. 2.	3.	4.
Story Analysis	1.		
Homework			
Quizzes			
Labs			

Academic Integrity

Don't cheat. The university has rules and procedures that could lead to severe disciplinary action, including expulsion, for academic misconduct.

The university's student code of discipline states that "examples of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to: cheating on an examination; collaborating with others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules of the course; submitting a paper or assignment as one's own work when a part or all of the paper or assignment is the work of another; submitting a paper or assignment that contains ideas or research of others without appropriately identifying the sources of those ideas; stealing examinations or course materials; submitting, if contrary to the rules of a course, work previously presented in another course; tampering with the laboratory experiment or computer program of another student; knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed."

Special University Services

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to students with special needs. Contact the Dean of Students at 424-3100 (voice) or 424-1319 (TTY). The Web site is <http://www.uwosh.edu/dean/disabilities.htm>.

Note: Course schedule may change depending on the pace of the class, the pace of the instructor, guest speakers or forces beyond human control.